

February 10, 2006 Friday

Dear FCC Commissioners,

I am a volunteer and sponsor of a progressive news program, DemocracyNow!, along with my Vancouver for Peace group who helps pay the sponsorship costs for airing this excellent program, and have been working with our public access station, Fort Vancouver Community Television (FVTV, channel 11) in Vancouver, WA, since July of 2003, when I first took an orientation class to learn more about our public access station. My impetus to get involved was seeing what my public access station from where I used to live, Arcata, CA, was doing with their programming and I wanted to help bring an award winning progressive news program, DemocracyNow! to our public access station as many public access stations were doing across the country, as well as help bring more diversity to the programming on our public access station.

I didn't know what a long road it would be to hoe to get to where I am today with helping this station move into the 21st Century. Our station was crippled from the get go it seems. I didn't realize that a city as large as ours (200,000) and with as much development and large businesses that bring in such an enormous amount of tax revenue, would be one of a handful of cities who do not provide any funding whatsoever for their public access station from the franchise general fund that is received from the cable provider, Comcast, which is currently a very low 5% per subscriber. It is shameful and embarrassing, to say the least.

From this general fund, which annually is nearly million dollars a year, the city/govt channel, CVTV, is given a half a million dollars of an annual budget, and the educational channel, TVetc, gets a quarter of a million. The city gave our public access station, Fort Vancouver Community Television, FVTV, a one time allotment of \$100,000 four years ago and with the go ahead to go non-profit and to try to stay afloat on fundraising for capital to run operating expenses, trying to get these funds solely from the producers and sponsors and the generosity of citizens who cared. We have no head-end of our own and use the city channel, CVTV's playback equipment, and we have no studio facility even though the city has a studio that I hear stays pretty much unused.

Since 2001 the station has barely been able to keep it's doors open under this kind of financial insecurity and strain. All the staff have been let go in the last few months and are staying on only to volunteer because there is no one else who knows how to run the station. This particular couple was the Technical Engineer and his wife who helped with the office work. They plan on moving to Tucson, AZ, where the public access station there is very well funded and is offering Robb Dunn opportunities that seem all but closed doors to him at our crippled and hobbled station.

Now the board members are taking turns at coming in to open the doors and keep the station

operating on bare bones minimum of hours and days. There has been a revolving door over the past year or so of frustrated board members who come and go due to the dire situation and very bleak and stagnant future that the station appears to have, making it difficult to keep board members with very little hope for our station to continue from month to month. Just paying the rent on the facility where the station presently resides has been deferred by the good graces of the property owner as the station does not have the money to pay the rent.

Dear Commissioners, we are in dire situation. I have recently learned about the Buske Group which represents many citizens' groups and cities to re-negotiate the franchise agreements with the cable providers, in our case that being Comcast. I have recently organized a citizens' group of primarily sponsors and producers of progressive programming, Citizens for Community Media of Clark County, to try and strategize on how best to help our station get funding reestablished. We are going to try our best to see that our public access station, and hence our community and citizens of Vancouver, WA, gets the fair shake it deserves.

Please, do not let us down in terms of our public access stations all across this county getting the support and funding they need through making sure legislative measures reflect a sensitivity to public access station's operational basic needs be met. This is a Constitutional issue of Freedom of Speech and expression. And also an issue of fairness and equality for all PEG, on par with one another. We need public access to be funded, as a requirement. If the cities can fund their city channels, they can also fund the public on and make it a level playing field for all.

I and several of my other dedicated producers and sponsors of diverse programming on FVTV are trying very hard to bring more programs in to give our station that needed moral boost and diversity she so desperately needs with locally produced programs and special single submissions of documentaries. I have taped three episodes of DemocracyNow! off my personal satellite system for playback for the past almost two years. Now, the station's board members have just signed the affiliate agreement with Freespeech TV and DemocracyNow! has offered to pay for the installation of the dish and receiver, so we are just about to receive this excellent program via satellite as well as other programs that will be made available for us. We trying very hard to get our station into the 21st Century.

Thank you for taking our situation under consideration. We are going to try our best to save our station from having it's doors closed. Please help us if you can. Please contact our city managers and have our franchise agreement reviewed, if at all possible by the Buske Group who can act as a mediator and arbitrator between the city, the cable provider, and our citizens'group. Our public access station needs your help.

Sincerely,

Alicia Balassa-Clark, Sponsor for DemocracyNow! on FVTV, public access for Vancouver, WA
Also member of a newly formed advocacy group-
Citizens for Community Media of Clark County
2309 NE Cranbrook Drive
Vancouver, WA 98664
360-896-1676
aliciabalassa7@msn.com